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Goodbye to the Bay of Pigs

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It was an emotional moment for all concerned on Saturday when the President received from the Cubans newly released from Dr Castro's prisons the flag of their brigade, which he promised to return to it in a free Havana. Mr Kennedy has always felt a strong personal responsibility for the fate of these men. But brief reports of the emotional scene, with the Cubans shouting "*Guerrea, guerra!*," do less than justice to the President's good sense. He spoke of a free Cuba but not a word of war and it is said that no military move against the island—even by the refugees—is contemplated unless Dr Castro takes the first aggressive step.

Instead Mr Kennedy read the exiles a brief, gentle lecture on their responsibility for submerging their own differences and for equipping themselves and their children with the disciplines and skills which they will need when Cuba is free again. And the President spoke to a much larger audience all over Latin America—including Cuba itself—when he promised that the United States would respect the right of a freely elected Cuban government to be as progressive as it liked. All of the refugees may not have welcomed this promise that if Dr Castro goes—as a result of domestic discontent, failing Russian enthusiasm and economic pressure—there need be no turning back of the clock.

In theory the ransoming of the Cuban prisoners—at \$53 million worth of baby food and medicine probably the costliest such operation in history—was a private enterprise. In fact, it is taken for granted in Washington that it could not have succeeded certainly not in the short time since the nuclear tension was relaxed, without the enthusiastic support of the government, particularly that of the Attorney General, Mr Robert Kennedy. Mr Donovan conducted the negotiations for the Cuban Families Committee but government officials worked with him and assured hesitant manufacturers that a free gift of the supplies would be in the national interest and would be treated, for tax purposes, as a charitable donation. Airlines, shipping companies and railways gave their services to see that a fifth of the supplies were in Cuba before Christmas with the rest to be delivered within the month. Dr Castro was amiable enough to let nearly a thousand close relatives of the prisoners join them in Florida, though they had to give up all their property. But if more are to leave he insists that commercial air services, which brought him a useful supply of dollars, must be resumed between Havana and Miami.